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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [NL](#)

SUBJECT: ARAB-EUROPEAN LEAGUE MOVES INTO THE NETHERLANDS

Ref: 02 Belgium 5430

[11](#). Summary: The militant Muslim Arab-European League (AEL) has spread its wings from Belgium to the Netherlands. The foundation of a Dutch section became official with the organization of a congress in late May, which adopted a platform and elected an executive board. At present, AEL-NL has about 800 members. The movement serves as a venue for primarily second-generation younger Moroccans to vent their frustration about discrimination, repression and lack of opportunity in the Netherlands. It has the ambition of becoming both a political party and activist Islamic movement but its fierce anti-Israel stance and militant segregationist rhetoric has elicited mostly negative reactions from the established political parties, as well as from Jewish and Islamic organizations. Because the situation in the Netherlands is different from that in Belgium, it is generally expected that the AEL won't have the same impact in the Netherlands as it did in Belgium (reftel). End summary.

#### Background

[12](#). The controversies in Belgium over the activities of the Arab-European League and its telegenic leader Abu Jahjah were widely covered in the Dutch media and did not fail to echo with the same groups of mostly Moroccan youth in urban centers. Abundant media attention to the AEL in Belgium created the momentum to start a similar movement in the Netherlands. Jahjah himself directed and controlled the efforts to get a Dutch chapter off the ground.

#### Dutch Branch Established

[13](#). In late May, AEL-NL (Arab European League - The Netherlands) held a congress to mark its foundation. The group began to build support leading up to the official kick-off through a variety of speeches and public appearances during the early months of 2003. Jahjah will serve as acting president of the AEL-NL until an appropriate local president can be found. Other members of the executive board include a political scientist, reporter, businessman and a student (all between the ages of 23 to 38); they are all Dutch nationals, three of Moroccan and one of Iraqi descent. One board member has been in police custody since mid-May on suspicion of extortion and theft. Jahjah commented that while he views the individual as innocent until proven guilty, a guilty verdict will have no consequences on his position. Jahjah stated "his possible criminal activities date from before the time that he became a member of AEL-NL and his choice for membership shows that he has chosen for a different life. We believe in giving Muslims a second chance."

#### Platform

[14](#). AEL-NL presents itself as a democratic and moderate Islamic party embracing Arab-Islamic values and norms. It believes, for example, that immigrants should learn the Dutch language and be loyal towards their new home country. They should integrate but not assimilate. AEL-NL also intends to campaign for leave on Islamic holidays and wants the education inspection board to monitor racist and discriminatory behavior by schoolteachers.

[15](#). However, AEL-NL's position towards Israel is extremist. It does not recognize Israel's right of existence and views Israel as a nation with institutionalized racism. AEL-NL believes that Israel should be dismantled and replaced by one democratic state of Palestine. AEL-NL adopted a resolution in favor of a comprehensive boycott of Israel and all Israeli products. AEL-NL also criticizes the "pro-American" and "Pro-Zionist" policies of the Dutch government.

[16](#). AEL-NL claims to have 800 members, most of them younger Moroccans and many of them students. To become a full member one must be either Arab or Muslim. AEL-NL intends to actively campaign to win more members in the upcoming months. It will decide next year whether or not it will

register as a political party. "The local elections in 2006 are a real option. We are also investigating the possibility of participating in the European elections in 2004," said Jahjah, but he conceded that political aspirations are not the highest priority currently.

#### AEL-NL elicits Negative Reactions

17. Spokesmen for the established Dutch political parties have been mostly dismissive of what may become the first ethnically-based political party in the Netherlands. The spokesmen sharply criticized the movement's stance on Israel, its confrontational approach and its tendency to incite supporters into violent protests (reftel). Dutch political parties maintain the impression that AEL is mainly media hype and will not amount to much in the Netherlands.

18. Established Muslim organizations, such as Islam and Citizenship are negative about the AEL's stance on Israel. One of the main Turkish Islamic leaders noted, however, that "agitation against Israel is a smart tool to mobilize Muslims." Islamic organizations do not believe AEL-NL will make much headway in the Netherlands because for most Moroccans the AEL is too intellectual and too narrowly focused.

19. The Director for the Center on Information and Documentation on Israel (CIDI) observed that AEL-NL was using the same rhetoric against Israel as Hamas, Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad. He had no sympathy for its call to dismantle Israel and to boycott Israeli products at a time that serious attempts are being made to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. CIDI has also raised concerns about possible ties between AEL and elements of the Netherlands Muslim community who may facilitate the activities of terrorist organizations. The Wall Street Journal has noted links between AEL leader Cheppih and the Al Waqf al-Islaami foundation, which is suspected of having ties to Al Qaida.

110. Comment: AEL-NL at present only appears to appeal to the "elite" and not to ordinary Muslim youngsters. However, the resonance of Jahjah's views shows that within this community there is a desire for someone who understands their ambitions and frustrations, speaks up for them and defends them. Much of the Dutch chapter's success will therefore depend on whether it is successful at finding a charismatic leader who matches up to Jahjah, who prefers to remain in Belgium. End Comment.

Sobel